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# Institutionalising the Guru-Shishya Parampara: A Study of Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy, Pune (1947–2026)

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***Abstract***

*In the cultural landscape of post-independence India, legitimizing classical dance as a profession was neither automatic nor uncontested. The pioneering contribution of Guru Rohini Bhate (1924-2008) established Kathak as a credible, sustainable vocation in Maharashtra, despite initial social resistance.*

*Guru Rohini Bhate's journey and that of Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy founded by her in 1947 are two sides of the same coin. As Nrityabharati approaches its 80th year on July 10, 2026, this paper is presented as a definitive academic record of the institution's enduring history and continuing journey.*

*While biographical treatments of individual gurus and stylistic analyses of the major gharanas are well represented, sustained studies of private training institutions– particularly those operating outside the principal metropolitan and gharana centres– are scarce. This paper addresses that gap through a focused study of Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy, Pune. The study of this institution is done for three reasons.*

*First, it is among the oldest continuously functioning private Kathak institutions in India, predating the Sangeet Natak Akademi (inaugurated 28 January 1953) and the Kathak Kendra (established 1964).*

*Second, it was established in Maharashtra, a state with no indigenous classical dance tradition and with a social milieu in which performance by women still carried considerable stigma.*

*Third, the institution has produced seven identifiable performer-generations, permitting analysis of how a specifically oral pedagogy — the Guru-Shishya Parampara — has been reproduced, codified and adapted over an unusually long institutional span. Written by current Director Neelima Adhye, this account offers the rare perspective of insider scholarship. Neelima has been a direct disciple and a witness to 70% of the journey of Nrityabharati. The proximity is not a limitation, but a lens, one that brings into focus details, textures and truths that no outside observer could have accessed.*

***Keywords:*** *Nrityabharati, Kathak, Rohini Bhate, institutional history, Guru-Shishya Parampara, dance profession, cultural heritage, Maharashtra.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Known as a center of learning, reform, and intellectual life, Pune had strong traditions of both Sanskrit scholarship and social progressivism. Yet it could not become a natural home for Kathak. Hence, the establishment of a Kathak academy in Pune in 1947 was, therefore, not merely a cultural act but a quiet radical one.

Eighty years later, **Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy** stands as one of the country's oldest and most distinguished institutions for classical dance training.

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The paper argues that Nrityabharati's sustained viability over seventy-nine years derives not from external patronage but from a deliberate synthesis of the Guru-Shishya Parampara with codified curricular structure, making it a productive model for understanding how classical performing arts institutions achieve durability.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This study adopts a qualitative, documentary approach combining three sources: (i) published writings by the founder, principally the Hindi-language collection *Laheja* (Bhate, 2005) and her Marathi and Hindi translations of Sanskrit and English dance texts; (ii) unpublished institutional material including concert records, repertoire lists, photographs and audio-visual archives held at Nrityabharati; and (iii) participant observation by the present author, who has trained since 1967, taught within the institution since 1979 and has served as its director since 2008.

The position of the author as a direct disciple of the founder and a serving director of the institution under study is acknowledged as both an analytical resource and a methodological constraint. It permits access to oral-tradition knowledge, pedagogical sequences and personal testimony that are not publicly documented; it also carries the risk of valorisation. To mitigate this, the paper adopts three strategies. First, claims about artistic achievement are, wherever possible, triangulated against independent testimony from external artists and institutional engagements rather than rested on authorial assessment. Second, the repertoire and choreographic output are analysed through representative categories rather than exhaustive cataloguing, pedagogical success is illustrated via representative artistes, and artistic growth is mapped through key milestone festivals. Third, the account is positioned as a documentary contribution — a primary-source-rich institutional history — rather than as a definitive critical evaluation.

## 3. HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the consolidation of the anti-nautch movement, which systematically stigmatised hereditary performing traditions and conflated the artistry of *devadasis* and *tawaifs* with immorality. By the time of independence, elite and nationalist efforts had begun reclaiming classical dance as a marker of cultural identity, but the social stigma attaching to women performers had not dissipated. In Maharashtra, two additional conditions shaped the reception of classical dance. First, the state possessed no indigenous classical dance form comparable to Bharatanatyam in Tamil Nadu, Odissi in Odisha, or Kathakali in Kerala; classical dance had therefore to be imported rather than recovered. Second, the middle-class social conservatism of cities such as Pune, though coexistent with strong traditions of Sanskrit scholarship and social reform, extended restrictive expectations to educated women.

It was in this climate that Nrityabharati was founded, not as an act of cultural nationalism, but as something quieter and more durable: an act of individual conviction. Guru Rohini Bhate did not wait for conditions to become favourable. She created the conditions.

The traditional mode of transmission in Indian classical performing arts — the Guru-Shishya Parampara, or direct oral transmission from teacher to disciple — had sustained these forms for centuries through largely family-based or residential lineages. The analytical interest of Nrityabharati lies in the attempt to reproduce this intimate, transmission-based pedagogy within a non-familial, non-residential, urban institution operating in a city without prior Kathak lineage — and to do so sustainably across multiple generations.

Pune in the 1940s presents a productive setting in which to examine this process. A centre of Sanskrit scholarship and of the Marathi literary and reformist tradition, the city combined intellectual receptivity with conservative expectations regarding the public conduct of women from its educated middle class. Classical dance was not illegible to this milieu — connoisseurs of Hindustani music and of Sanskrit aesthetics were numerous — but its institutional normalisation required the construction of an audience that did not yet exist

for it. Nrityabharati's early programming may be read, in part, as a response to this absence: the academy did not present itself solely as a training institution but as a site for the wider cultural legitimation of Kathak in a Marathi-speaking audience.

## 4. GURU ROHINI BHATE THE FOUNDER

### 4.1 Formation of a Dancer-Scholar

The name **Guru Rohini Bhate** resonates with a unique, deeply evolved dance style within Kathak, and a monumental legacy in terms of disciples and creative contributions. One can visualize her with an assuring beautiful smile, a contented and fully awakened demeanor, small lit eyes, a slim, tall and graceful posture, and clad in a simple yet tasteful attire!

**Guru Rohini Bhate**

Guru Rohiniji's journey involved significant struggles against societal norms in Maharashtra. She chose to put up a silent fight, allowing her relentless work to speak for itself. She eventually rose from being taunted in Pune, her city, as a 'dancer', to becoming the 'Pride of Pune' and an essential figure among Kathak maestros in India.

In 1947 she founded the Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy in Pune without having any real idea of the national scenario of Kathak at the time but over time, she kept gathering information and knowledge, sought the right guidance, and embraced 'Kathak' in its fullest form, nurturing both herself and her disciples. Over her long, 60-year career graph, she remained thoroughly active and productive, experiencing the fullest possible growth of an artiste.

Barring the initial years of learning from others, Guru Rohiniji from age 27 received training in the Lucknow and Jaipur gharanas from **Pt Mohanrao Kalliyanpurkar** and later in the Lucknow gharana from **Pt Lachchu Maharaj.**

She received tutelage through the established oral tradition, the coveted Guru-Shishya Parampara. With her academic mind set, in the long intervals between lessons, she independently comprehended, analyzed, and organized her insights, and thoroughly understood and mastered the essence of Kathak. This left a distinctive imprint on the curricular codification she later undertook at Nrityabharati.

### 4.2 Guru Rohiniji - The Dancer

Any institution is a reflection of its founder, in terms of its philosophy and caliber. Hence it is necessary to throw a glance at her style of dancing, though in brief. She set extremely high standards for her disciples through her own dance.

**Pure Dance:** Guru Rohiniji was known for her taal presentations and intricate rhythmic filigree work. There was a beautiful contrast in the execution of her movements, creating a mesmerizing texture of her dance showcasing at once flow and precision, stretch and release, abandon and restraint, subtlety and vibrancy, deliberation and spontaneity.

**Expressive Dance**: As her Guru Pt Mohanrao had predicted, she brought a revolution in the aspect of abhinaya. Her abhinaya was replete with innovative gestures, similes, variety of interpretations, symbolic elaborations, use of gatbhav and an introductory doha before entering the main subject, mostly written and

musically adorned by her. The supreme element of her abhinaya was her timing of executing emotions. She performed frequently in the 'baithak ka abhinaya' (sitting down) format of kathak.

Her small eyes would convey immensely. With the spirituality in her rendition, her vibrations and extremely profound body language would reach till the last row as well as to a complete layperson.

She silently kept working, guided by her motto "**Janije Yagyakarma**", akin to working as an offering to a sacred fire. She helped many girls find their own identity, their pride, their field of interest and a medium for self-expression.

### 4.3 Intellectual contribution

**Books:** Her scholarly output paralleled her performing career and constitutes an unusual case of dancer-as-author in twentieth-century Kathak. Three contributions are particularly significant. In the earlier period, by translating Isadora Duncan's **My Life as *Mi Isadora*,** she developed a way and vocabulary for writing about dance, that too in Marathi, a regional language**. Laheja (Bhate, 2005),** a collection of her essays originally published in Marathi and subsequently compiled and translated into Hindi, offers a sustained body of analytical writing on Kathak practice. **Kathak Darpan Deepika** is her Hindi translation of the Sanskrit treatise **Abhinayadarpanam.**

Guru Rohiniji's intellectual contribution extended well beyond the stage and the classroom. As a scholar, she gave Kathak a written voice documenting, translating, and theorising the art form with the same depth and precision that she brought to its practice. In this respect she stands alongside figures such as Kapila Vatsyayan and Sunil Kothari as a foundational contributor to Indian dance scholarship.

She also contributed to curricular development at institutions including the **Lalit Kala Kendra, Savitribai Phule Pune University**, served on academic committees at **Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh**, and served as examiner at the **Kathak Kendra, Delhi** and at many other dance institutions. This institutional shaping of academic curricula is among the most durable and underacknowledged dimensions of her contribution.

Two moments in her performing career illustrate the reception of this training within the gharana tradition itself, and are worth noting for what they indicate about the authorisation of a non-hereditary dancer within an orthodox lineage. The first is the 1956 performance, documented by Kallianpurkar, at the **Bindadin *Deodhi*** in Lucknow at the invitation of **Pt Shambhu Maharaj**, the residence and teaching hall of the patriarch of the Lucknow gharana. The second is a 1978 seminar at the Kathak Kendra, Delhi, at which both her principal gurus were present in the audience together and praised her as she mirrored specialities received from them. These episodes, attested in the writings of her own teachers, offer an external warrant for her subsequent role as a teacher of record in the Lucknow and Jaipur gharanas — a warrant unavailable to most first-generation urban dancers of her period.

Recognitions for her artistic and scholarly work included the **Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar**, the **Kalidas Samman**, **Pride of Pune**, an honorary **D.Litt.,** and the **Sangeet Natak Akademi Ratna Puraskar**. These institutional markers are relevant to the present analysis not as encomia but as indicators of the founder's placement within the national field at the time the academy she founded was consolidating its work.

## 5. NRITYABHARATI - A TRAILBLAZING JOURNEY

### 5.1 Pioneering the roots of Kathak in Maharashtra:

At the beginning of the first leg (1947 to 1972) of the journey diverse, intellectually rich poems by renowned Marathi and Hindi poets were explored through solo and group dance performances. Her socially conscious dance dramas showcased an aesthetically rich imagination and presentation style, drawing and appealing even the conservative audiences. For instance, "**Krishna-Koyna**", shed light on the Koyna River dam dispute even when it was ongoing, while "**Jhelum che ashroo**" depicted the pain and turmoil of India's partition. Such

pieces remained largely unnoticed in the mainstream Kathak scene due to the limitations of that era. The Authenticity of the work was apparent to the intellectuals and artistes from the fields of music and literature. In spite of the initial resistance the people of Pune, due to a basic progressive mindset, started supporting not only as audience but as parents of upcoming dancers.

Nrityabharati saw **exponential growth in the first 25 years**! Learning dance had become a new status symbol for families. With authentic training of Kathak, programs, tours, educational projects, international representation, and a growing number of students and comprehensive programs such as '**Rasik ho Parisa Nrityakath**a – come, **listen to the story of the Art of Dance**', the Academy earned recognition as a highly esteemed, cultural institute from Pune.

During the year of **SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS, 1972**, for the first time in the cultural history of Pune, an array of all Indian classical dance styles was brought to Pune, exposing dance students and audiences to diverse dance forms. Nrityabharati organised a year-long series of programs featuring distinguished artistes who performed and conducted lecture-demonstrations.

The esteemed invitees included: **Kathak- Pt. Lachhu Maharaj & Pt. Mohanrao Kallianpurkar, Kathakali- Shri Krishnan Kutti, Manipuri- Jhaveri sisters, Odissi & Kuchipudi- Ritadevi, Bharatanatyam- Parvati Kumar & Elakshi Thakore, Dance Ballet- Sachin Shankar, Mohini Attam- Kanak Rele, Taal Kacheri- Pandit Suresh Talwalkar.**

This year long dance extravaganza culminated with two performances by Nrityabharati. One in Mumbai, where revered Gurus like **Pt Mohanrao Kalliyanpurkar, Pt Lachhu Maharaj, Pt Vasantrao Deshpande** assembled on stage and stalwarts from the classical music field graced the audience, including **Kumar Gandharva, Jitendra Abhisheki, Manik Varma,** and more. The final event in Pune spanning three days, showcased three distinct Kathak recitals exhibiting the rich repertoire of Nrityabharti. This milestone event in Pune was a moment of pride for both the institute and the city.

### 5.2 Grooming generations of dancers and the proliferation of Kathak

The teaching sessions were extensive, with ongoing corrections as well as repeated demomnstrations. The Guru being completely accessible, the interaction with the disciples used to be direct and open for question-answers. This openness, hard to find in the Guru-shishya tradition, was a major step towards institutionalization.

Students were nurtured with both, affection and discipline, were fired with a zeal that combined austerity and joy, and were impressed with a sense of a rich inherited tradition together with the immense scope of contemporaneity and experiment.

Training at Nrityabharati focused primarily on the solo format of Kathak, providing comprehensive grooming that spanned from an awareness of Sanskrit treatises and their relevance in Kathak, to exploring the contemporary without departing from the grammar of Kathak. A '5 level' course was established allowing students to progress at their own pace, mastering assigned material before appearing for an individual exam, and as a result fostering optimal growth at each level. Most of the disciples so trained, went on to pursue Kathak in all possible aspects, that is to perform, teach, choreograph and do research in their chosen areas.

It is remarkable that this pedagogical approach and culture were so impressive that they percolated in all related sections of the society, such as dancers, accompanists, technicians, parents, relatives, audiences etc.

Nrityabharati's **Golden Jubilee Celebrations, 1997** showcased –

» **"Nritya Ojas**", the first ever male dancers' festival in Maharashtra, bringing about a transformative shift in the Maharashtrian perspective towards male dancing. Top artistes of today made their debu in Pune. Artistes such as **Rajendra Gangani, Deepak Maharaj, Maulik Shah, Sandeep Mahavir and Nrityabharati's Sunil Ganu** performed in this landmark festival.

» **'Sanchit aur Srujan I'** provided a shared platform for the principal Kathak schools of Maharashtra, with the Founder publicly honouring the heads of these institutions — a gesture with institutional significance in a field often marked by inter-school rivalry.

» The second event in this series, **'Sanchit aur Srujan II',** was attended by **Pandit Birju Maharaj** as chief guest, alongside **Pt Bhimsen Joshi**, **Dr Jayant Narlikar**, **Dr Ashok Kelkar, Bhai Gaytonde, Jyotsna Bhole, Bhaskar Chandavarkar, Ravi Paranjape, Sumitra Bhave and Ashok Ranade**, who were felicitated on the occasion. Birju Maharaj's recorded remarks noted the continuation of artistic practice by the institution's female dancers into and beyond the stage at which attrition is commonly observed in the field — an observation that bears on the question of institutional retention. An edited record of the event is preserved in the episode **Smrutigandh** of the institution's archival video material. He also appreciated the Founder's work not only for igniting a flame by establishing the institute, but by saving it from all kinds of storms and taking it to completeness by creating many like her.

**Amrut Mahotsav Celebrations, 2022**

Nrityabharati celebrated the completion of 75 glorious years through a novel Amrut Mahotsav, showcasing a series of yearlong online releases, to name a few - "**Legacy of Guru Rohini Bhate", "Nrityasamidha", "Udayonmukhi", and "Chintanika**" highlighting the institute's rich inheritance, interviews of the five leading dancers of Silver Jubilee celebrations, performances and creations of today's seniors, experiences of accompanists and specially the young talent of Nrityabharati.

A Principal live production titled '**Amrutmantahan**' brought together fifty dancers from five of the seven generations of the institute. Each composition highlighted a different category. The production was a seamless blend of recorded narration, live dances, and videos of Guru Rohiniji, put together in a sleek and unprecedented format. It was truly a historic event in the cultural progression of Pune.

**A three-day multidisciplinary festival was held at new Delhi, at the India Habitat Centre and Kathak Kendra**, on the theme of '**the five elements'**, which included a revival of a precious ballet **Tanmatra** on the topic after twenty-five years and explorations of renowned artists of Bharatanatyam, contemporary dance and Poetry. The scale of this seventy-fifth-anniversary observance, undertaken by an autonomous institution without external funding, is unusual in the field and illustrates the convening capacity that a long-duration private institution can develop.

**The Centenary Year of the Founder**, observed from November 2023 to November 2024, produced the two-day festival **Rohinidyuti** in Pune, in which thirty dancers presented compositions across the categorical range of the founder's repertoire, and a seminar on '**The Interrelations of the Art of Dance with the Other Fine Arts'**, convening specialists across disciplines.

The centenary observances culminated in Delhi before an audience that included **Dr Sandhya Purecha** (Chairperson, Sangeet Natak Akademi), the parliamentarians **DR Vinay Sahasrabuddhe and Sudha Murthy**, and senior dancers across classical styles who had witnessed the Founder's work along with dancers of various styles and generations — an institutional moment that both marked the completion of a hundred years from the founder's birth and served as public affirmation of the institution's continued capacity for large-scale artistic assembly.

## 6. DISTINCT IDENTITY THROUGH ENORMOUS CREATIVE LEGACY

Nrityabharati's grand image, embodied by Guru Rohiniji and her productions, became increasingly familiar to the audience, establishing a distinct identity for the institute.

**It is also extremely important to note that every generation of Nrityabharati produced some very talented choreographers, who added to the repertoire. Only Guru Rohiniji's creative legacy is mentioned here with representative listing.**

### 6.1 Innovation Within Tradition

Guru Rohiniji created intricate elaborations of **taals,** ranging from six and a half to 33 maatras, treating each with meticulous attention to its intrinsic design. As extensions of presenting a taal, numerous technical pieces were created, such as **Roopkathak, Chatarang, Tarang, Raag sagar, Taranas, Sargams etc.**

Poetry, Dance and Music had become one in Guru Rohiniji. She has offered an entirely new and precious repertoire to the world of Kathak which enhanced its very scope while equally enriching the realms of music and poetry.

She created dance numbers spanning all known formats such as Bhajans, **Keertans, Dhrupads, Thumris, Kavitas, Dohas** etc. She also created pieces like **Horis, Kajris** etc based on oral folk traditions of India.

In her choreographic work, other than her own, she used poetry ranging from Vedic Richas (**Ushasukta, Parjanyasukta**), to Japanese Haiku. She employed works of medieval poets like Rasakhan, Vidyapati (**Vartamangupta)**, Brahmanand Swami, Giridhar Purohit (**Ritugaan**), Pt Bindadin Maharaj (**Thumris and a ballet 'Binda Kahe'**), and also many contemporary poets (**Kavitali**). She also created ballets titled **Malhar, Nritya-Gopal and Udgaar.**

At the zenith of her artistry, from 1997 to 2008, she composed some 10 to 12-minute masterpieces for the solo format, which aesthetically encapsulated the essence of Kathak, providing a sense of completeness.

### 6.2 Contemporary within Kathak

Guru Rohiniji's 15-20 major thematic productions during 1986 to 1998 seem like individual chapters on skillfully integrating and extending the elements of Kathak to contemporary themes and timeless subjects. She believed that technical virtuosity need not be an essential ingredient for completeness or effectiveness in choreography; it should be employed judiciously based on the thematic requirements.

Her most notable masterpiece is **'Tanmatra'** (the subtle forms of the five elements) created in 1992. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan entrusted her with this subject to be presented at an international physicists' conference in New Delhi. Beyond the verses from the Vedas provided by Kapilaji, the music, the choreography, the costumes, the script were all created by Guru Rohiniji for this one-hour ballet. The music, at times, seemed to become the text to convey such an abstract theme effectively. The ballet received tremendous appreciation from physicists, the dance community, music lovers, Sanskrit scholars and general audiences alike, suggesting that the inter-disciplinary translation was legible to its several constituencies.

"**Time**", a ballet from 1986, was conceptualized as a sequence of expressions exploring the perception of the principle of Time. Time was portrayed as the all-pervading distant observer of all creation.

"**Maun**", Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore's poem, was interpreted in 1990 not as 'silence' but as 'the voice of the absolute'. The recitation of the poem was designed with impeccable timing, and with music limited to humming.

While choreographing Bhavani Prasad Mishra's poem '**Suraj ke khilaf'** in 1991, which depicts cynicism, she added her own twist at the end, conveying that truth, beauty and concern can win over insensitivity, frustration and pessimism.

The ballet **Flight,** 1997 was commissioned by Span Aviations for their first anniversary, in which she transcended the concept of a physical flight for a human being to finding one's medium of self-expression and taking multiple flights in that field, eventually towards self-realization.

These thematic elaborations were timeless and never strayed away from the inherent grammar or texture of Kathak's movement. They will always remain alive and relevant.

The Nrityabharati troupe has performed in over twenty countries at the invitation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and other bodies, with recorded tours in China, France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, the United States, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Australia, Italy, Malaysia, Singapore, Liechtenstein and several countries in Africa.

## 7. GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

The analytical utility of Nrityabharati as a case study rests substantially on the observability of seven performer-generations, each exhibiting both continuity with and extension of the Founder's pedagogical and creative orientation.

**Sharadini Gole, Sheela Gokhale, Jayashree Tambe, Shama Bhate, Sunita Purohit, Aruna Kelkar, Neelima Adhye, Amala Shekhar, Roshan Datye and Prajakta Raj** are among those who have contributed sustained teaching and administrative work at the institution. Of these, **Sharadini Gole** — an early and long-serving associate of the founder — played a particularly sustained role in the consolidation of the institution's pedagogical foundations. A wider set of direct disciples — including **Prabha Marathe, Amala Suri, Sunil Ganu, Hasita Oza, Rajashree Javdekar, Prerana Deshpande, Vidya Deshpande, Jayashree Moghe, Manjiri Mahajani, Deepti Gokhale, Neha Vaidya, Carolin Dassel and Helen Torabi** — have extended the institution's reach through independent practice in India and abroad.

The currently senior cohort, comprising **Roshan Datye, Neelima Adhye and Amala Shekhar,** combines performing, teaching, choreography, writing and research. Many of their disciples have proved to be authentic bearers of the legacy.

The succeeding cohort — which includes **Prajakta Raj, Sharvari Jamenis, Rujuta Soman, Maneesha Abhay, Asawaree Patankar (Sangeetacharya) and Dr Aabha Wamburkar** — holds postgraduate qualifications from the Lalit Kala Kendra of Savitribai Phule Pune University, is empanelled with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and directs independent Kathak institutions while continuing to perform with the Nrityabharati ensemble.

A seventh generation, including **Abha Auti, Dhanashree Natu, Mayur Shitole, Venu Riswadkar, Siddhi Abhay, Anuja Khirsagar, Shrungali Paranjape and Ketaki Wadekar**, is at an earlier stage of its professional formation. Branch centres operate in several parts of Pune, in other Indian cities, and internationally.

The period since 2008, following the Founder's passing, is analytically important because it tests the principal question raised by the study — whether a tradition predicated on direct oral transmission can sustain its pedagogical and artistic character once the originating guru is absent. The evidence suggests that it can, subject to three conditions: institutional codification of the curriculum prior to the guru's passing; continuation of core repertoire through trained senior disciples serving as guardians and transmitters; and the development of cross-generational teaching platforms that allow students from branch centres to access the full range of senior gurus. Nrityabharati has pursued each of these. Inter-Disciplinary Collaboration

## 8. INTER-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

Throughout its journey, Nrityabharati's dancers have been fortunate to have received exceptional musical support from accomplished artistes:

**T**hese collaborations locate Nrityabharati's Kathak practice firmly within the broader Hindustani music ecology of western India and illustrate how a dance institution can contribute to the maintenance of an inter-art performance culture.

## 9. CARRYING ON GURU ROHINIJI'S LEGACY

### 9.1 Looking ahead

At Nrityabharati, the traditions established by Guru Rohiniji remain intact and are being faithfully carried forward. Students have the opportunity to learn her thought process, choreographies, and repertoire, kept alive by Guru Rohiniji's direct disciples, now senior teachers at the institute who also explore their own areas of interest through research and choreography. They hold positions as Gurus and examiners in various

universities and many of their students have acquired Master's degrees in Kathak. Together, they engage in extensive creative work and eagerly collaborate on various projects under the esteemed umbrella of Nrityabharati.

The current **Director and Principal, Neelima Adhye**, has successfully ensured the continuation of the institute's culture (including charitable deeds). She has also developed a university-like system where students from various branches can access the expertise of senior Gurus of Nrityabharati though workshops and lectures, providing all-round development.

### 9.2 Training & Culture at Nrityabharati:

- The educational approach has mirrored the traditional Gurukul system, offering personalised instruction, immersive training and holistic character development.
- From its early days, the institute has adhered to a comprehensive five-level curriculum codified by Guru Rohiniji, drawing from her extensive training in the Lucknow and Jaipur gharanas but uniquely developed into her own style. The five stages - **Pravesh, Parichay, Samvedan, Aswadan, and Prabodhan** - gradually yet definitively equip students with the vocabulary of Kathak movements, rhythmics and academics. Individual exams at every stage ensure optimal growth and command over subject matter.
- The framework preserves the principal pedagogical feature of the Guru-Shishya Parampara — the primacy of the teacher-disciple encounter, repeated demonstration, and incremental correction — while inserting it within a codified structure that permits institutional reproduction beyond the lifetime and physical presence of a single guru.
- An academic teaching approach provides meticulous practical and theoretical training in dance and in allied arts like music and literature
- Nrityabharati nurtures students to excel through platforms like the "**Masik Nrityasabha**" where they receive extensive training to perform solo, and learn to organise, compère, conduct padhant, etc. for fellow students. Experimentation in the medium is an ongoing activity. The Academy explores new creative avenues in an annual "**Gurupaurnima**" celebration, where students perform their own creations as gurudakshina, instead of monetary or material offerings.
- The institute extends support to financially challenged students, assisting them with fees and costumes. Students are well-prepared for external exams conducted by prestigious institutions like the Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahvidyalaya and Pune University, where they consistently excel. The academy's rich library and other resources foster research in the Performing Arts.

These features, taken together, constitute what may be described as an institutional adaptation of the *gurukul* model to a non-residential urban setting: personalised instruction, immersive engagement, and a broader emphasis on comportment and judgement alongside technical acquisition.

Nrityabharati will continue to groom well-rounded dancers who represent the unique style and texture of dance that focuses inward. Nrityabharati also plans to contribute to the holistic growth of dancers from the wider Kathak community through short courses, workshops and lecture demonstrations that pass on Guru Rohiniji's philosophy.

The prayer chosen for the institute, "**Om Sahanavavatu**," encapsulates this spirit of collaboration, mutual support, and collective growth, a mindset that has ensured that the institute thrives and flourishes for over 75 years.

The story of Nrityabharati tells us that longevity in the arts is not accidental. Nrityabharati has endured because it was built on something deeper than a curriculum or a performance tradition — it was built on a culture, on the spirit of ***Om Sahanavavatu***, of growing together, of mutual nourishment. That culture, transmitted through seven generations, is both Nrityabharati's inheritance and its most precious offering to the future.

## 10. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis suggests that Nrityabharati's seventy-nine-year continuity can be accounted for in terms of four structural features, rather than in terms of the charisma of any single individual. These are:

(i) the codification of an oral pedagogical tradition into a graded and examinable five-stage curriculum that could be reproduced across teachers and locations;

(ii) an explicit generational transmission strategy in which senior disciples were systematically prepared for teaching, administrative and artistic leadership roles;

(iii) a creative repertoire oriented toward the extension of classical grammar to contemporary themes, which maintained relevance for successive audiences without diluting the technical inheritance; and

(iv) sustained inter-disciplinary collaboration with the Hindustani art-music tradition, which embedded the institution in a wider performance ecology.

The case reported here contributes to the institutional history of Indian classical dance in two ways. First, it documents a private institution that preceded the principal state bodies of the field and that has sustained a functioning pedagogical and performance programme across seven generations — a comparatively rare configuration. Second, it offers a preliminary analytical vocabulary (codification, generational transmission, repertoire extension, inter-disciplinary embedding) that may be applied to other private institutions of the same period. The proposition that classical arts institutions in India can achieve durability through the deliberate articulation of oral-tradition pedagogy with codified curricular structure is offered not as a conclusion established by a single case but as a hypothesis warranting comparative investigation.

**Declaration of Interest**

The author is the current Director and Principal of Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy, the subject of this study. The methodological implications of this position are discussed in Section 2.

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**Neelima Adhye** (M.A. Kathak; M.Sc. Mathematics) is Director and Principal of Nrityabharati Kathak Dance Academy, Pune, and a direct disciple of Guru Rohini Bhate. She has performed in India and internationally and directs Prakruti Kathak Nrityalaya. Her editorial and documentary work on the founder's legacy includes co-translation and presentation of the **Hindi edition of Laheja**, conception and direction of the **documentary film Laheja** drawn from the institution's archival holdings, and the audio compilation **Noopuradhuna Pyaari** of selected musical compositions by Guru Rohini Bhate with accompanying exegetical notes. Her principal area of research is the creative and pedagogical work of Guru Rohini Bhate. She has revived many a ballets of her Guru and has created the one of a kind show titled '**Amrutmanthan**' to showcase the journey of Nrityabharati,